

From: [Sally C. Strain](#)

To: [current newspaper](#)

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Subject: "Viewpoint" article - "National Trails Day and the C&O Canal National Historical Park"

"National Trails Day and the C&O Canal National Historical Park"

National Trails Day, sponsored by the American Hiking Society (www.americanhiking.org), is Saturday, June 4. A good place to celebrate the occasion is in our own backyard -- the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

Two locations in the Park are especially worth visiting this year for very different reasons:

One is the Gateway to the Park, just upstream of Key Bridge in Washington, DC, where the city quickly changes from an urban setting to green open space. Ride your bike on the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT), which begins there, hike along the Towpath, or paddle along the Potomac River shoreline. Enjoy the scenic views, the historic structures and the recreational and ecological aspects of this national, regional and local treasure at our doorstep. Then consider how the area will be changed forever if Georgetown University is permitted to build an enormous private boathouse in the Park -- between the CCT and the River, along the narrow, fragile, floodplain and next to the busy recreational corridor at the entrance to the Park. The boathouse would be the length of a football field, and it would rise above the level of the Towpath. High school and public boating programs would not be allowed to use the facility, despite its size and location. Decide for yourself if the project is in the public interest, if it conforms to the Comprehensive Plan, and if there is a better way to both protect the Park from private development while providing boating opportunities for both collegiate and public programs at a different location.

In contrast, the other place worth visiting along the Towpath trail is the wonderful new Lockhouse 8 River Center in Maryland (www.lockhouse.org), established earlier this month by the Potomac Conservancy as an environmental and historical education center. Open weekends from May to September, 10AM-2 PM, its aim is to provide information about the Canal and the River, with exhibits and activities for visitors of all ages, hands-on learning and restoration programs. Nature walks and river cleanups, and a "Voices of the River" series exploring the history, culture, and ecology of the River and the Canal, are also included. It took three years for the Potomac Conservancy, hundreds of volunteers and many businesses, to restore the building and develop the center in an arrangement with the National Park Service. Enjoy your visit to the lockhouse with your family, followed by a picnic along the Canal or the River, and rejoice at the magnificent new public resource in the Park that is available to everyone.

These sites represent two different visions of our historic C&O: One is a precedent-setting, McMansion-type private facility unsuitable for the Gateway to the Park, and the other is a tiny, renovated historic lockkeeper's home that is open to everyone as an

educational center. Visit both locations on National Trails Day and consider which "path" you prefer for the Park of today and for future generations, and which one represents good stewardship of historic properties as mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.